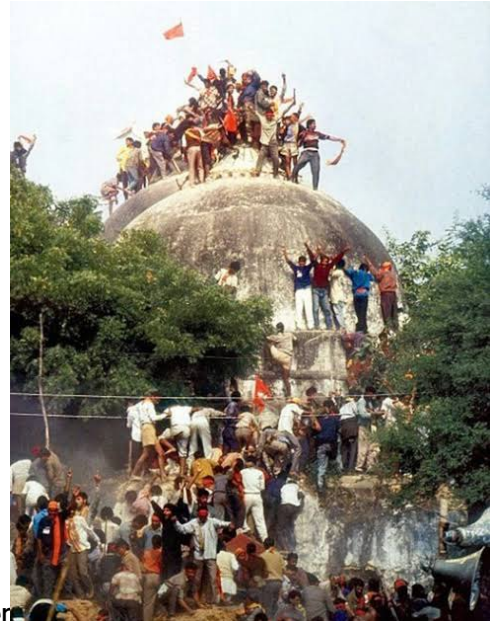


"Sacred Structures in Peril: Confronting Fanaticism in India.



ShahFaraman Gowher

Temple desecration and destruction has been a controversial and hot topic among the historians after the destruction of Baburi mosque of Ayodhya in 1992. The debate was again highlighted recently during the judgment of the hon. Supreme Court of India in Ram Janam Bhoomi Case which awarded the original land for the construction of temple and awarded another 5acre land elsewhere for the construction of mosque. The inauguration of the temple this year was a massive celebration throughout the country. The issue of temple destruction was also recently addressed by famous you tuber which spilled some of the historical facts on the issue. This article is an attempt to see the sensitive issue of Temple Destruction from the lenses of historical facts and literary resources. This article is also an attempt to burst the radical myths which are colored with a tinge of communalism.

After the destruction of Baburi mosque of Ayodhya in 1992. Richard M. Eaton wrote a monograph entitled Temple Desecration and Muslim States in Medieval India in 2000. In this book he raises some questions regarding to temple destruction and concluded that in those days temples were patronized by the ruler and associated with the ruler, and deity placed in the royal temple was considered as a co-sovereign. So, if a ruler defeated another ruler, it was necessary work for the victorious king that he had to destroy not only the enemy king and his army but also the deity located in the royal temple. If the victorious king did not desecrate or destroy the royal temple of enemy there would be chances of uprising because the locals by assembling around the old deity could stand against the conquering ruler. This was a process of sweeping away of all previous political sovereignty. Such act in fact started in India seven centuries before

the invasion of Turks. Eaton lists the Hindu kings from various dynasties as the Pallavas, the Chalukyas, the Cholas, the Pandyas, and the Rashtrakutas were indulge in this practice. Hence this established pattern was followed and continued by the Turk invaders, Delhi Sultans and later on by the great Mughals

Richard Davis, in his work, goes at length giving extensive description and evidence of the desecration of temples in an attempt to mark the authority and might of the conqueror. In 642 AD, according to the local tradition, the Pallava king Narasimhavarman I looted the image of Ganesha from the Chalukyan capital of Vapati. Fifty years later the Chalukya king Vinayaditya brought back from Northern India to the Deccan, the images of Ganga and Yamuna, supposedly looted from their defeated powers. A similar act was adopted by the Rashtrakuta king Govinda III in the 9th century when he occupied Kanchipuram, who in turn was sent several images by the Sri Lankan king (which represented the Sinhala kingdom) which were then placed by Govinda in his Shiva temple. The Pandyan king Srivallabha too seemed to have invaded the Sinhala kingdom around the same time and brought back a golden image of Buddha which was a part of the Sinhalese Jewel Palace. The Chola king Rajadhiraja and Harsha of Kashmir had also followed the tradition of looting and plundering kingdoms defeated by them in the 11th century. Therefore, the destruction of royal temples of the political adversaries was a common practice among the major Hindu dynasties.

The attacks on Jain and Buddhist temples for the sake of war booties was also a regular practice during the early medieval period which seems to have been widely incorporated by the Hindu and Muslim kings alike

As far as the 17 attacks by Ghazni are concerned, they have been attributed to political as well as economic motives. Mahmud of Ghazni, at the given time, was facing a security threat in Ghazni which called for a standing army and maintaining such an army could have had been possible only with the availability of finances. It was for this money that he plundered the Somnath temple which was famous for its wealth. Ghazni not only attacked Somnath but also plundered a mosque in Mansurah.

The attacks on the temples in the Gangetic plains by the early Turkish rulers like Balban are attributed to the need for money in order to safeguard their northwest frontier from the Mongol attacks. Typically in India, temples formed an integral part of the constitution of the political power hence it was important to destroy the temples once the authority had been destroyed. During the Delhi Sultanate on the one hand many temples of Banaras were destroyed during the war time, on the other hand we have references that show some temples were built also in Banaras by Delhi sultans such as the rebuilding of the Vishvanath temple in Iltutmish's reign (1211-36) and Padmesvara temple during the reign of Alauddin Khilji (1296-1316)

While Jaya Jaitly's book Woven Textiles of Varanasi (2014) argued that many temples, monasteries and ghats were constructed during the Mughal period., there are some evidences which point on opposite as well.

Showing a tolerant policy, Humayun made a grant of 300 acres of land to the Jangambadi Math of Banaras through a Farman. Akbar known for his tolerant policies when heard that a dilapidated temple was converted into a madrasah (college) by the shiqdar (governor) of Banaras named Bayazid Bayat. When Akbar came to know about this happening, he dismissed Bayazid, and gave two villages for the allowances of the

teachers of this temple

However, when Jahangir marched against his arch enemy Rana Amar Singh of Mewar in 1613, he ordered for the desecration of Varah statue that had been housed in a temple at Pushkar (Ajmer) associated with Rana Amar. Similarly Shah Jahan demolished the grand temple at Orchha in 1635 when the raja revolt against the emperor (Eaton, 2004: 59, 60). Shah Jahan's reign He ordered not to demolish old temples but did not allow the construction of new temples.

Aurengzeb has been labelled as religious bigot by some historians but other historians like Satish Chandra, M. Athar Ali feel that Aurangzeb has been the worst victim of prejudiced writing in history. Athar Ali shows by statistics that the percentage of Hindu mansabdars was 22.5% in Akbar's reign, but it increased to 31.6% during Aurangzeb's reign. It has been mentioned earlier that whoever revolt or show the sign of rebellion or disloyalty to the state, it was cogent work of the state to suppress him and destroyed the royal temple belonging to him. A revolt arose among landholders in Banaras in 1669; some of them it is said to have helped to Maratha ruler Shivaji who lately escaped from royal imprisonment. It was suspected and assumed that in this work Raja Jai Singh, the great grandson of Raja Man Singh who rebuilt Vishvanath temple of Banaras during the reign of Akbar the great, assisted Shivaji. Aurangzeb had to order for temple demolition under this circumstance (Eaton, 2004: 61).

Not only temples were desecrated and demolished but mosques were also face the same fate by Hindus. Sui literature of Lahore mentioned that when Mahi Pal sacked Lahore, many Muslims were killed and mosques were demolished, and Hindu temples were built in its place (Ahmad, 2002: 89). According to Abbas Khan Sarwani, the Hindu landlords in Malwa and the regions around Delhi destroyed mosques and set up temples by the debris of mosques. Rai Sen, a confederate of Rana Sanga, converted mosques into stables and plastered with cow-dung at Chanderi, Sarangpur and Ranthambore.

So, on account of the above noted aspects, it can be said that it is very difficult to find out one reason that was responsible for the demolition of Temples it can be surmised that the act of temple demolition took place due to the contemporary socio and political circumstances, not the discriminatory religious policy . The destruction of temples in general used to be a part of political expansion and temples were not destroyed once the pacification or establishment of political formation had taken place. In most of the cases once the consolidation of power had taken place the same temples were patronized and maintained by the imperialist power.